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Mwenda Ntarangwi, David Mills and Mustafa Babiker (eds), *African Anthropologies: history, critique and practice*. Dakar: CODESRIA and London and New York NY: Zed Books (hb £65 – ISBN 978 1 84277 762 8; pb £18.99 – ISBN 978 1 84277 763 3). 2006, 274 pp.

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MWENDA NTARANGWI, DAVID MILLS and MUSTAFA BABIKER (eds), *African Anthropologies: history, critique and practice*. Dakar: CODESRIA and London and New York NY: Zed Books (hb £65–978 ISBN 1 84277 762 8; pb £18.99–ISBN 978 1 84277 763 3). 2006, 274 pp.

In recent years the status of African anthropology in the discipline as a whole has sometimes seemed very marginal. Relatively few jobs are advertised specifically for African anthropologists, and the theoretical agenda-setting heart of the discipline sometimes seems far away from the kind of empirically grounded, ethnography-based work that African anthropology has tended to excel in. This is not to say that Africanist/African anthropologists are not doing theoretically topical work, but there is a sense that African anthropology does not punch its weight in the discipline as it once did through the work of key anthropological ancestors such as Evans-Pritchard, Radcliffe-Brown or Meyer Fortes; or later in the work of the Manchester School. Part of African anthropology's marginality in the discipline may be a result of, to put it at its crudest, a mixture of post-colonial guilt and post-modern uneasiness about the status of anthropological knowledge in general. If the former undermined the self-confidence of anthropology's ability to represent any 'other', then the latter heralded a 'reflexive' approach that at times threatened to abandon any kind of useful representation at all.

And if African anthropology is marginalized in our discipline, then this is compounded by the fact that there are still very few African or Africa-based anthropologists. In comparison to other disciplines within African Studies, African anthropology still seems very biased towards non-African, expatriate academics. Perhaps anthropology is still a dirty word in some African universities, but sketchy comparisons with other regional anthropologies (such as South Asian anthropology) suggest that this post-colonial condition is not at all inevitable. The problem then is twofold. African and Africa-based anthropologists increasingly need to set the agenda for African anthropology, and African anthropology in turn needs to play a more central role in the setting of anthropological agendas as a whole.

It is in this broader context that this edited collection is extremely welcome. Its usefulness is threefold and relates directly to its stated concerns with history, critique and practice. Its first five chapters provide historical accounts of the colonial trajectories that anthropology has taken in different parts of the continent (Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Cameroon). The contribution here is a nuancing of anthropology's colonial past in Africa. Anthropology was not always simply in the pocket of colonial administrations, nor was colonial interest in anthropology one-dimensional. Just as colonialisms manifest themselves in very different ways across East, West and Southern Africa, so different anthropologies' imbrication in colonial regimes of rule varied across space and time. The point here is not to reduce (or exaggerate) African anthropologies' colonial pasts but to complicate them. Mills's discussion of Audrey Richards's involvement in the establishment of the East Africa Institute illustrates how local politics and individual personalities were often key determinants in the relationship of anthropologists to colonial administration. Pankhurst (Chapter 2) discusses the plethora of different national research traditions (including Italian, French, German, British, American and Japanese) that have coalesced in their own specific historical and political contexts in Ethiopia, despite the country's uniqueness 'in having largely escaped the effects of colonization' (p. 51). Muzvidziwa (Chapter 4) considers the waxing and waning fortunes of the teaching of

anthropology in Zimbabwe, where a loyalty to empiricism and particularly an increasingly applied focus has given it new relevance in recent decades. This contrasts to the situation in Cameroon (Abega, Chapter 5) where a French philosophical orientation coalesced with problems of funding, teaching, and an ongoing mistrust of administrative/political authorities into a 'crisis' of declining anthropology-related publications. If 'the presence of indigenous anthropologists from French-speaking African countries still looks modest' (Abega, p. 132), then perhaps the greatest success of these historical chapters lies in their illustration of the significant role played by Africans in 'shaping the views of foreign scholars' (Pankhurst, p. 68).

This theme is developed in greater detail in the second section of the book, where contributions discuss the historical marginalization of African voices in scholarship on Africa, in what amounts to an eloquent call for continued and deepened anthropological engagement by African and Africa-based scholars. Fabian (Chapter 6) uncovers a myriad of ways in which 'forgetting Africa' is not only a moral or political problem, but fundamentally an 'intellectual failure' (p. 146). Obbo (Chapter 7) explores African perspectives on anthropological knowledge production to assert that 'the African renaissance will be bogus without a grounded anthropological base' (p. 167). Particular critiques developed by other chapters include the long 'avoidance of Islam' (Launay, Chapter 9) by French and British anthropologists and the continuing 'paucity of African voices' in the contemporary anthropology of Islam; and the problematics of a 'crisis' perspective on African pastoralism – particularly the herder/farmer dichotomy, which, Babikar suggests, reflects a continuing 'tendency to convert differences of degree into differences of kind' (Chapter 8, p. 180).

The third section of the volume explores some of the contributions that African anthropologists have made to knowledge through research for social development, public health and education. Here the particular structural problems facing African anthropologists come to the fore. There is probably much to be said for a structural, educational and economic analysis of the career paths and research interests of African-based scholars in the context of diminishing funds for tertiary education and 'pure' academic research, and an increasing reliance on 'consultancy culture'. As the editors discuss in their introduction, shortages of resources for research and teaching, and low salaries, have been a major 'disincentive to serious anthropological work of Africa by Africans' (p. 30). But the marginalization of African anthropology as a whole in anthropology, and that of African/Africa-based anthropologists in particular, is not merely one that can be resolved by addressing structural conditions of African scholarship. The larger question implied here remains one of agenda setting in anthropology as a whole. As the editors note, 'a particular problem for many African researchers has been the way they have ended up serving as local sources of basic information... for their more fortunate colleagues abroad, who add "more value" to such information in the form of analytical, interpretative or expansive theoretical contributions to the literature for African consumption' (p. 30).

The editors' optimism is important. Despite being 'inevitably torn between forging its own identity and building on the traditions of scholarship' from elsewhere, African anthropology 'can decentre Western epistemological traditions by unpacking African ways of knowing, creating its own traditions of reflexive anthropology and cultural critique' (pp. 32–3). The empirical strength of African anthropology can and should be deployed in 'discriminating engagement' with theoretical fads emerging from anthropology elsewhere with its frequent 'insistence on creating meaning even when lacking information'

(Sichone 2001: 371, cited p. 31). If African anthropology is to overcome the problematic distinctions between 'applied' and 'pure' anthropology which have often seen it marginalized in the discipline as whole, then it will have to become more theoretically engaged, but without losing its grounded, empirical strength. As the editors suggest, the adoption of anthropological methods and approaches into other disciplines suggest that anthropology can still make claims about 'its rightful place as the "mother" of African studies' (p. 40). Yet the problem I started out with remains—African anthropology's marginalization in the discipline of anthropology as a whole. Although the quality of some of the chapters here is stronger than that of others, this volume is an important initial step in the right direction.

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